

*The Address—Mr. Firth**[English]*

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to say a few words in the other official language of my country and tell my colleagues that although I come from a region where the population speaks practically only French, I am pleased to assure each of you here that you will always be welcome in my region. It is a beautiful region and you will certainly enjoy your visit to my riding.

On the other hand, I hope, as a French speaking Canadian, that we will also always be accepted by others in the rest of Canada, and that the long battle fought for the recognition of our rights in this country will finally come to an end for the good of all of us as Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join my colleagues in congratulating you and your colleague on being chosen to the high office of Deputy Speaker and Speaker, very difficult and most respected offices. I congratulate you, and may the Great Spirit guide you in your work.

• (1720)

Before I begin my comments on the Speech from the Throne I should like to give you a little of the background of my family. My purpose is not so much to brag, but to give credibility to what I have to say here today and to what I will be saying here in the future.

My grandfather on my mother's side was a famous Shandalar Indian from Arctic Village. When he was a little boy there were no white people in his part of the country. He was a peacemaker with the people during the surveying of the boundary lines between Alaska, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. That was in the very early part of this century. He was born about 1850.

My grandfather on my father's side was a Scotsman from the Orkney Islands. He worked for 52 years as a chief factor for the Hudson's Bay Company in the Mackenzie district, in the Peel River country. He also was a peacemaker between the Indian, the Eskimo and the white man. Both of my grandfathers were very good friends and they did much for this country in the early times. My grandfather, John Firth, financed Vilhjalmur Steffanson's first expedition in exploring the High Arctic. He was also one of the first J.P.'s and honorary constable to work in the Peel River country. I hold up these handcuffs to show you Mr. Speaker. They were his, but he never once had to use them because he had the respect of the people, the Indian, the Eskimo and the white man.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: Up in that part of the country my paternal grandfather John Firth, and my maternal grandfather Dinji Cho, were big men for many years. They died only about 25 or 30 years ago. I think they did very valuable work for the good of Canada and for the good of mankind in that part of the country. As a member of parliament representing the Northwest Territories and representing the native peoples of that part of the country, I will try to do my best to work for mankind and for Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: I stand here very proudly as a Métis and representing the largest constituency in Canada. And, if I am not mistaken, I believe I may be representing the largest electoral constituency in all the world. I speak of course of the Northwest Territories which has an area of 1.3 million square miles. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that any government in any other part of the world would allow such a stupid situation to exist.

The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) have travelled parts of my country, and they can vouch for what I have to say in that respect. It is an almost physical impossibility for one man to give good representation to that very important part of Canada. You must take into consideration not only the vastness of the land, the harshness of the climate, the difficulty of travel up there, and the extreme high cost of travel, but also the lack of a good communications network, and the fact that there is not only a diversity of languages but also great differences between east and west in the Northwest Territories. I mean cultural differences.

As I say, there are several languages spoken in that part of the world, and today there is still a very high rate of illiteracy. I was indeed most disappointed not to learn from the Speech from the Throne that that situation would be changed. Another omission in the Speech from the Throne that I was not very happy about was that the Inuit, the Indian and the Métis people, the very first citizens of this land were not even mentioned.

In my constituency approximately two-thirds of the population are people of native ancestry. They were at one time some of the richest people in this land. Today they are some of the very poorest people in this land. This is especially so in terms of very bad and dangerous housing conditions, the extreme shortage of housing, and the lack of good community services. As long as this situation continues to exist with the very first citizens of this land being the very poorest in their homeland, I fail to understand how one in this country can say, "I am proud to be a Canadian." That is a disgrace to this nation. That is the truth, and I am sure you all know it. I would suggest that it is especially a disgrace when this country can spend millions of dollars for a pie in the sky, or for something better known as Anik.

If the present trend continues, as it now seems likely it will, with the government and large companies in the south continuing their exploitation of the beautiful north, and with the south trying to make the north into something like the south, with big ugly cities, and all the pollution and other things that go along with civilization, without the people of the north having any meaningful say in the whole matter, then I am sure this country will be in great trouble.

A few months ago Reverend Father Adams of Inuvik, who spent 30 years up in that part of the world, who learned the language of the people and who lived with them, mentioned that if oil and gas lines are built in the north, particularly in the Mackenzie corridor of the Northwest Territories, there was a danger some people up there just might blow up the pipelines, particularly if those people did not derive any long-term benefits from them. I

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would like to add my warning that that danger does indeed exist.

It was only a few months ago that a hint of this situation was given when the court house, the seat of justice, at Hay River in the Northwest Territories was blown up. Give us six more years of a colonial type of government in the Northwest Territories, give us a few more years of school and job training without any jobs at the end of the schooling or training, give us five or six more years of people from the southern part of the country running our lives by remote control, give us a few more years of insufficient federal representation and I, or anyone else who knows the north as I do, can guarantee that this country will be in deep trouble in the north.

I do not advocate that the Northwest Territories should not be developed; I do not say that at all. I want to make that very clear. I do want to mention two priorities at this time, and only briefly. The first is that the aboriginal rights and native land claims for that part of Canada must be settled, and settled soon. When I talk about aboriginal rights sometimes I wonder about a land deal made back in 1871 between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian government. I do not know who was guilty of the misdemeanor, but some deal took place between three parties without the fourth party involved having any say in it.

We should be allowed to have a more fully elected government in the Northwest Territories, a more responsible and fully elected government. Then, and only then, can orderly development begin. In the meantime, I believe it is important that a good prospectors program, a good incentive program for exploration and prospecting work, should be encouraged at this time in the north. But it should be carried out very carefully, and the people of the Northwest Territories should have some say about where such work can take place. I say this because I think we should find out once and for all if we do have a big storehouse of oil, gas and minerals in that part of the world, to be developed by Canadians for Canadians. On the subject of oil and gas pipelines, I think it might be wise at this time to take a more careful look at the situation and abandon the idea of building a large pipeline, possibly two pipelines, before talking with the people in that area. I think the people of that part of the country should be consulted before such work or such study is undertaken.

I also think we should look at the feasibility of building a railway line rather than a pipeline, and of course, Mr. Speaker, this all would be done only after the settlement of aboriginal rights and the native land claims of the people up there. I do not think the idea of a pipeline is wise at this time, but to some extent I would go along with the idea of building a railway. Canadians are good at building railways, I think, but pipelines are so specialized in nature. There are many arguments in favour of a railway.

• (1730)

I should like now to mention a few pressing needs of the Northwest Territories. One is in the area of housing. I should like to see some funds made available as soon as possible to the Northwest Territories government in order

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to fully implement the report of the Northwest Territories Council task force on housing. This report was adopted by the territorial council in October of last year in Frobisher Bay, but I understand it has become hung up somewhere along the line.

To point out the desperate need for housing in many parts of the Northwest Territories, I should like to read an open letter addressed to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories which was printed in a recent issue of "*News of the North*" which is published in Yellowknife. This letter reads as follows:

Dear Sir:

I feel compelled as both a social worker and a resident of the Northwest Territories to bring to your attention a matter which is causing me great concern. You have no doubt been aware for some time of the critical shortage of low cost housing in Frobisher Bay as well as the terrible substandard conditions of some of our present housing. However, in the event that this matter has not been brought to your attention, I would like to share some of my observations with you.

As a growing community of 2,500 people and a reported growth centre in the Baffin region, I do not understand why there have been no new houses built in Frobisher Bay this year. In fact we have lost six houses to fire this year and these have not been replaced or repaired and now stand empty. People are continually moving to Frobisher from the outlying settlements and yet there is no housing for them. It is not unusual to find new families of eight or nine people forced to move into the already crowded homes of residents where they must live in the hope that a house will become vacant. In the last little while there has been a large influx of young single people coming here looking for jobs; not only are they not finding jobs, but they are forced to sleep wherever they find room.

Not only is there a critical need for new housing merely to accommodate our expanding population, but the existing housing situation is a disaster. A great many people live in condemned substandard housing. In one matchbox which is certainly no larger than ten feet by twelve feet there resides a 70-year old lady, here two grandchildren; and three other related adults. In another one of these units which should have been destroyed years ago, a mother and her two children live with plywood over the windows and very poor heating. In all these units there is only one exit which is separated from the rest of the house by the stove creating a serious fire hazard. In many units plastic of plywood covers the windows and doors to keep out the bitter wind.

Maintenance is almost non-existent. People must wait weeks and even months to have a door or window fixed. Even in some of the larger homes the residents must use gas stoves and patchwork to keep out the wind and cold. One older fellow had to leave the shack which was his home after a storm left six inches of snow in his room. In some houses I have visited, the temperature is in the fifties and people must wear coats to keep warm. Contrary to what many people might think these are not isolated situations, at least not in Frobisher.

The implication from this lack of adequate housing is reflected in the life of the community. One of the highest T.B. rates in the world; seven serious fires this year involving three deaths, drinking is rampant, and past the critical point; family problems have compounded and dissatisfaction among the young people is growing like a cancer. And yet—no one appears to care.

We are constantly hearing about all the positive growth in Frobisher. We receive a one million dollar ice arena. Someone is building a \$20,000 royal suite in the apartment complex for visiting dignitaries complete with \$900 tea settings and \$3,000 dining room suites. Yet the local people must live in dehumanizing, degrading and dangerous housing. Is this somebody's master plan for Frobisher?

I know you get a large number of invitations for tours, but next time you are in Frobisher give me one hour of your time and I will

give you a tour which will leave you with a sick feeling in your stomach. I know it gives me that feeling. Along with anger and frustration because nobody is doing anything about it.

I understand you are a sensitive person and one that cares for the native people. It is for these reasons, I am writing this letter in the hope you will use your influence to do something about this tragic situation.

Yours sincerely,
L. H. Thompson, M.S.W.
Frobisher Bay, N.W.T.

Mr. Speaker, I can vouch for the accuracy of these statements. I made my rounds to almost every home in Frobisher and everything the writer has to say is true. There is even a lot more to tell. Therefore, I ask that funds be made available as soon as possible to the Northwest Territories government for the implementation of their housing program.

Regarding the Local Initiatives Program, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the rules leave a lot to be desired, especially where the program pertains to the Northwest Territories. The cut-off date of May 31 is totally unrealistic for the north. I should like to see some allowance made for the fact that many programs cannot be started there until after breakup, usually at the end of May. Ice on the rivers and lakes prevents such projects as airstrips for communities and docking facilities from getting under way. I think this matter should be given consideration.

Another topic that has been making the news almost every fall in the Northwest Territories and many other parts of the country is the matter of search and rescue, a very important topic indeed. Millions of dollars have been spent in years past in searches for lost aircraft, particularly in the Northwest Territories. These millions have been spent in many ways looking for people who were lost. I think a lot of that is rather foolish. It should not be necessary to spend millions of dollars in searches if the money were spent properly in the first place to provide navigational aids, good weather reporting—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: These searches would not be necessary if such services were provided. I know whereof I speak because I have flown commercially in the Northwest Territories for a few years. The flying industry is very important to the people of the Northwest Territories because of the vastness of the country and the lack of roads. We accept aircraft as a means of transportation to a greater extent than most people in other parts of this country. But we do not have sufficient navigational aids or sufficient good weather reporting stations, Mr. Speaker. This situation must not be allowed to continue. We are losing too many lives and losing a lot of the taxpayers' money on searches instead of using it to prevent people and planes from getting lost in the first place.

Another program which would prevent aircraft and people from being lost in the Northwest Territories is in the area of pilot training. I suggest that we could use a good pilot training program in the Northwest Territories through which the native people in that part of the world could be used. I think it has been proven that this would work because of the success of the native pilots we have

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up there already. The program would not cost too much money as it could be run as a student loan program where some of the money is recovered when the trainee goes to work as a commercial pilot, an aircraft mechanic or mechanic pilot. This is something that should be looked into very soon, Mr. Speaker, as the program we have at the moment is not working out.

To fill another need in the north, a trappers assistance program should be initiated as soon as possible. The trapping industry could be a big industry, as it was before, but certain events have taken the trapper away from his trap lines, such as the building of the DEW Line which provided high wages at a time of depressed fur prices. Fur prices are good now and game is available, but there is no program to help the trapper get back on the trap line. I suggest that the cost to outfit one trapper and help him get back to the trapline would be in the neighbourhood of \$3,000 to \$4,000. I suggest that some sort of trappers' loan program should be set up to help these people who are unemployed in the Northwest Territories.

Reverting to the subject of roads and highways, Mr. Speaker, I should like to mention the need for a highway in northern Alberta. This is not part of my constituency but such a highway would tie in with the Mackenzie highway system.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: The road that I am talking about would benefit the towns of Fort McMurray, Fort Chipewyan, Fort Smith, Pine Point, Hay River and that area. The road would be an all-weather highway from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith. It would, as I say, tie in with the Mackenzie Highway system. There is a great need for this road. I do not think it would be difficult to do, and ought to be done as soon as possible. I think it would be a wise move if either the Alberta government or the federal government were to build that road, since it would help to bring down the high cost of living in certain areas and also contribute to the tourist industry.

• (1740)

To sum up my remarks, Mr. Speaker, what I should like to see done for the Northwest Territories and its people is as follows: I should like to see the aboriginal rights and land claims of the native peoples of that part of the country settled. As I said earlier, this is important and in the next few days I hope to be introducing bills on this subject. Then, I should like to see one or two more constituencies created in the Northwest Territories so that the area could be represented by two or possibly three members of parliament. Finally, I should like the government to consider giving us more responsibility in governing our own affairs by replacing our colonial type of administration with a fully elected territorial council.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: Then, we could move forward to a well planned, orderly, industrial, social and economic development of the Northwest Territories and, possibly, to provincial status.

